

in Rockford. She has done everything from cleaning an ice rink with a Zamboni to trying her hand at beekeeping. And with every Cheri-on-Shift, she would ask her constituents: What do you need from me in Washington?

Just ask her staff. The answers to those questions made all the difference in Cheri's office.

Consider the case of a nurse in Galesburg who told Cheri she was so concerned about the lead pipes in her home that she was planning on dropping out of nursing school to cover the cost for replacing them. Cheri told her: We are going to do this right. And soon, she learned it wasn't just one nurse who was suffering from lead pipes, but the entire community.

So Cheri kept her promise to that nurse. She found the Federal and State dollars to help make things right in Galesburg.

If you want to see the difference that can be made, look at what Cheri has done for the Rock Island Arsenal. When I entered the Senate, the Rock Island Arsenal was on its last leg. I'm sorry to say, there were people at the Pentagon determined to close it. I was not going to let that happen, but I needed the right partner—and that partner was Cheri. Today, the Rock Island Arsenal's future is bright. We worked together with TAMMY DUCKWORTH to secure hundreds of millions of dollars in funding and projects to upgrade that facility.

In fact, the Rock Island Arsenal will soon be home to the largest 3-D printer in the world, which will build lighter, cheaper, and safer frames for military combat vehicles. It is one of the many ways that Cheri has helped position Illinois to lead in the future of manufacturing with union workers at the helm.

Justice and opportunity for all—that has been Cheri's passion since she was the little girl that I first saw at the Callahan dinner table. It is the passion that has defined her years in public service and her decade in Congress.

One of her final acts in Congress is one that will have impact across America for decades to come. She passed a law to end forced arbitration for sexual assault survivors. After she steered that bill through the House, I had the honor of working on it successfully as chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee. This law will ensure that every survivor can have their day in court. And it wouldn't have happened without CHERI BUSTOS.

So it is sad for me that Cheri is leaving at the end of this term. It is worth noting that in returning home, she has remained true to those who sent her here. You see, Cheri is a strong believer in stepping out of your comfort zone. She says it is "where the magic happens." And it is a theme throughout her career. Every 10 years or so, Cheri switches gears—from journalism to healthcare to city council to Congress; and, now, I don't know what the next step will be.

I think I speak for every resident in Illinois's 17th district in saying: Cheri, we can't wait to see what you achieve next. My wife Loretta and I are amazed, but not one bit surprised, to see how far you have come. You see, we have trusted you for a long time—when you were a babysitter for our kids, the graduate of Illinois Women's Institute for Leadership, the IWIL Training Academy, to one of the most accomplished legislators and constituent advocates in the House of Representatives.

Somewhere out there, both Gene and Ann Callahan are beaming with pride with what their daughter has achieved.

I want to wish a wonderful holiday season to Cheri, her husband Gerry, her sister Lynn and her husband Al, her three kids, Tony, Nick, and Joey, and their daughters-in-law, as well as the grandkids. Now that you are retiring, I am sure you will have plenty of time for dancing to Stevie Wonder around the Christmas tree.

FDA

Mr. President, in July, the FDA Commissioner Robert Califf requested an external review of the Agency's food offices.

It was months after the infant formula crisis began, when a bacterial outbreak forced Abbott to shut down one of the largest formula facilities in the country and sent parents into a panic. Remember, this crisis could have been prevented by the FDA. FDA inspectors found several compliance issues at Abbott's Sturgis plant in September 2021. The Agency also received a complaint about that same exact facility in October 2021. But, they didn't ask Abbott to initiate a recall or warn the public until February 2022.

This wasn't the first time FDA has failed to prevent an outbreak though. This year alone, the FDA has opened more than 25 investigations into foodborne illness outbreaks. So I was glad when Dr. Califf recognized that the FDA has fallen short of its responsibility to protect Americans, and turned to the Reagan-Udall Foundation to conduct an external review. It was long overdue.

This month, the foundation completed its review. Its report concluded that the FDA's culture, structure, and lack of funding have undermined its effectiveness. The foundation found that, "there is no clear leader or decision-maker" in FDA's food offices, which tips the scales "in favor of inaction, minimizing risk, and maintaining the status quo."

Inaction, minimizing risk, and maintaining the status quo—Americans deserve so much more. They deserve the fundamental assurance that what they feed their families won't make them sick. That is exactly why the foundation concluded its report by calling on FDA and Congress to implement structural reforms. Specifically, one of the options the foundation recommends is that FDA to be separated into two agencies: the Federal Drug Administra-

tion and the Federal Food Administration. As it happens, I introduced legislation earlier this year with Congresswoman DeLAURO that would do just that: the Food Safety Administration Act.

The Reagan-Udall Foundation also encouraged Congress to take a close look at the FDA's funding and resources. Consider the fact that the FDA had just nine employees working in the infant formula office when the crisis hit. That is nine people overseeing a \$3.5 billion industry—absolutely unacceptable. We need to do better than that.

Commissioner Califf needs to act on the foundation's recommendations as soon as possible. We, in Congress, need to address this issue with the seriousness it deserves as well. All of us have family members, friends, and constituents who have fallen ill after a meal—or even died. Let's reform the FDA before the next crisis.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Republican whip.

BROADBAND

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, as a resident of a rural State, expanding rural broadband access has long been a priority of mine, and I am not the only one.

Over the years, Congress has dedicated significant resources to closing the digital divide, and that has been especially true over the past 3 years. Congress has appropriated a lot of money for broadband lately—"a lot" being \$79 billion, to be precise—dedicated solely to broadband-related projects—\$79 billion on top of the billions of dollars the Federal Communications Commission disburses annually under its Universal Service Fund. That is an unprecedented amount of money. In fact, with that much money, we ought to be able to deliver gold- and diamond-laced broadband to every household in the United States.

Appropriating money is not enough. We could throw trillions of dollars at the rural broadband problem and still not close the digital divide. All of the money in the world is useless if it is not being spent the right way. As I said, we have enough money now that we ought to be able to deploy gold- and diamond-laced broadband across the country, but I have serious questions about whether this money is actually going to meaningfully move us toward closing the digital divide. The money we currently have, as much as it is, is spread out over 15 separate Agencies and 133 programs—133 programs. To say that that is not conducive to a coherent rural broadband strategy would be an understatement.

Now, the lion's share of the funding does go through one Agency—the National Telecommunications and Information Administration, or NTIA—but it is an Agency with a very poor record of efficiently disbursing broadband funding. The last time Congress provided NTIA with a big infusion of

broadband funding—by the way, a fraction of the funding it is now responsible for—the Agency struggled with its implementation and ended up overbuilding existing broadband networks, resulting in billions of taxpayer dollars being spent with little to show. I have seen very little to convince me that NTIA is likely to do much better this time around.

In July of last year, the NTIA called for volunteers—volunteers—to help determine how to allocate the \$1.5 billion that Congress had provided to NTIA to improve broadband access—volunteers. Yet Congress has now put the Agency in charge of distributing the \$42.5 billion in the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment Program.

I am deeply concerned that, without serious oversight, the NTIA will make and is already making similar mistakes in managing its current broadband programs, which is why, earlier this month, I began an oversight effort to review the numerous Federal broadband programs. The oversight of how Federal broadband dollars is being spent is necessary to make sure that Agencies aren't misusing billions of taxpayer dollars and, most importantly, to make sure the funding is going to the areas that are actually unserved.

I have already requested input from a diverse group of stakeholders to identify ways that we can improve broadband programs—and broadband policy more generally—as we head into the 118th Congress, and I have requested that Federal Agencies provide information on their efforts to improve broadband infrastructure siting, which is a key component of deploying broadband networks.

In the new year, I will work on compiling these responses and presenting stakeholders' concerns to the NTIA, to the Federal Communications Commission, to the Department of Agriculture, and to the Treasury Department. If changes need to be made to the programs Congress has established, I will do everything that I can to hold Congress and Federal Agencies accountable for making those changes so that all of these programs work as effectively as possible and as Congress intended.

To expand rural broadband access and actually close the digital divide, it is not enough to just appropriate money. We also need to make sure that money is being spent in the right way. I am committed to doing everything I can to ensure that the money that has been appropriated for rural broadband actually goes to expanding access to those who are currently unserved.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Washington State.

HEALTH, EDUCATION, LABOR, AND PENSIONS
COMMITTEE

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I have had the honor over the past several years to lead the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee. It is a

committee that I truly feel represents the heart and soul of our country's values. As I prepare to hand over the gavel now to my colleague Senator SANDERS in the new Congress, I want to take a moment to reflect on the incredible work we have done on our committee and to recognize the many people who have made it all possible, especially my colleagues on the committee over the last 8 years, who worked time and time again across the aisle to solve tough problems together, from healthcare to education, to supporting workers and retirees, and working to ensure that everyone can live with dignity and respect. The issues that we tackle are the issues families across our country face in their everyday lives, and they are the issues I constantly hear about when I am talking with people back home in Washington State.

During my time as the top Democrat on this committee, spanning three Presidential administrations, we have had so much to talk about. After all, a lot can happen in 8 years, especially when you push, every day, to work with your colleagues to make progress for our families.

We have made sweeping changes to help students and families, defended and expanded healthcare coverage, and worked to bring down drug costs. We have updated and expanded worker training. We have helped to expedite and expand our national efforts to bring cutting-edge medicine to millions. We have addressed the unfair practice of surprise medical bills and more—all before we worked to face the COVID pandemic.

During our COVID response efforts, we were able to bring about the largest Federal investment in childcare ever. We provided significant resources to get all kids safely back in the classroom and address students' academic and mental health needs, which the pandemic worsened. We made historic investments to ensure seniors and people with disabilities can get the care they need to live independently, and we saved the pensions of over a half a million workers and retirees and counting.

But if I had to pick one moment that set the tone for my time in leading this committee, I would have to say it was right after the 2014 election, when I was preparing to take over as ranking member and Senator Alexander was the incoming chair. As every colleague in this Chamber knows, Senator Alexander was a true partner and was always wanting to sit down and find solutions to problems. For 6 years, we continued the longstanding HELP tradition of finding bipartisan solutions to issues, large and small.

Early on, we sat down and found that we both were hearing from schools and educators and parents who all agreed that the No Child Left Behind law was not working. We had to do better. It was time to replace the No Child Left Behind Act. Now, Senator Alexander, my partner across the dais for 6 years,

had said before that he had initially been thinking of just moving forward on a partisan bill. Thank goodness that did not happen. He chose to work with me. Together, we followed his old 80-20 rule of finding the 80 percent where we could agree and working on that to help American families. Instead of staking out partisan positions, we staked out common ground with a bipartisan draft bill, which ultimately became the Every Student Succeeds Act.

That was one of the first of many bipartisan breakthroughs HELP has made over the last 8 years. But in following that model, it was far from the last. In fact, 1 year and 3 days after President Obama signed ESSA into law, he was signing another massive bipartisan HELP bill—the 21st Century Cures Act—a package of policies focused on advancing biomedical innovation for patients and families. Our bill also included sweeping mental health reforms championed by Senators MURPHY and CASSIDY. It focused on addressing the opioid crisis, and it created the Beau Biden Cancer Moonshot. We built on that work even further with our 2017 FDA user fee package. Even now, Senator BURR and I are strengthening that legacy in our end-of-the-year package.

Senator Alexander and I also worked with Senator CASEY, Senator Enzi, and others to strengthen our workforce with a bipartisan reauthorization of the Perkins Career and Technical Education Act, which invests in students and workers by giving them the education, skills, and training they need so they can get better jobs and higher wages, and it includes accountability measures to help improve programs and ensure that people aren't falling through the cracks.

In working with Senator HASSAN and Senator CASSIDY, we passed the No Surprises Act to finally end surprise medical bills and establish new price transparency rules for hospitals. Our legislation has already stopped millions of people from getting hit with exorbitant bills for the care they thought was covered, including 2 million patients in Washington State.

Senator Alexander and I also passed the SUPPORT for Patients and Communities Act in order to fight the opioid crisis and help those on the frontlines of that effort. It is painfully clear, in light of the sharp rise in the youth mental health crisis and the deadly new threat of fentanyl, that there is more to do here, which is why Senator BURR and I have been working around the clock this year on the bipartisan package of mental health and substance use disorder policies that are now included in the omnibus.

Then, of course, there was COVID-19. On the HELP Committee, we worked quickly to respond to the pandemic, in the spring of 2020, with historic bipartisan relief bills and regular bipartisan briefings and oversight hearings to press the administration about the issues with our pandemic response. The